

Interview With Dr. Jerry Buss, Owner of The
Los Angeles Lakers and L.A. Forum

MJ: OK, today is the 28th of December 1988, Dan Junge and Mark Junge are in the office of Dr. Jerry Buss, the owner of the L. A. Lakers, in his meeting room in the fabulous Forum in Los Angeles and we are going to do an interview with Jerry about his work and life in Wyoming. Anything to add to that Dan?

DJ: No.

MJ: Alright. Ok. Do you just want to give me your name?

OK. Alright, to begin with Jerry I guess I am pretty ignorant about your past, I have not read the Sports Illustrated article dated 1981. I haven't kept up exactly with what you've been doing except what I've heard by word of mouth or what I have read incidentally in the newspaper, so I'm sorta ignorant on your past. Can you, would you be willing to tell me where you were born, when you were born some of the vital statistics.

JB: I was born in Salt Lake City, Jan 27 1933. My parents very shortly thereafter moved to Evanston, Wyoming. They were then divorced and I grew up in Evanston until about 1942. My mom then took me to Los Angeles where I spent three years - then the war ended. In the meantime she met a man in California but she had known him previously from Wyoming and they were re-married, they have 2 children and we went back to Kemmerer Wyoming where he bought a plumbing business.

MJ: C. O. Brown?

JB: C. O. Brown was his name, that's right.

MJ: I've met him.

JB: Yeah, sure.

MJ: Is he still around?

JB: He's still alive, lives in Phoenix, with actually one of his daughters, one of those 2 children. And I think he's about 80-81 now, something like that. So I went to high school in Kemmerer, Wyoming, graduated 1950 then went to the University of Wyoming and graduated in 1953. From there I went to USC and I received a doctorate in Chemistry actually, in 1957. From there I went to Boston and worked for Arthur D. Little as a business consultant for about 8 months until I believe February of 58. I came back to Los Angeles because I missed it, I love Los Angeles. Went to work at Douglas Aircraft worked there for two years in their space division. Went from there to Thomas, Ramo, Woolridge (TRW) and worked 2-1/2 years until July of 62 at which time I quit and devoted myself full time to real estate.

MJ: You covered a lot of ground in just a very short time. Can we go back just a little ways?

JB: Sure.

MJ: When you were growing up in Evanston, right, do you remember the schools you went to?

JB: Well, I only went to the first, second and third grade there. And I don't recall the name of the Elementary school I remember one of the teachers was called Essie Mae Burdette, so that would have been 1941, about that time.

MJ: What are some of your earliest memories, being raised in Wyoming?

JB: Well, I really don't remember much to tell you the truth

until I returned in 1945. From 41 back to 33 is very vague in my memory. That's what happens when you get old I guess. From 1945 to 1950 it seems like I don't remember essentially every day I went to Kemmerer high school I had various odd jobs, I worked at Kemmerer hotel my job there was to shine shoes and to carry suitcases up the stairs for the various people.

MJ: Do you know that's still there?

JB: I saw that recently, I was back there about 2-1/2 years ago and I went into the Kemmerer Hotel and walked up the stairs It brought a lot of memories walking down the halls and thinking of those times when I used to carry some very heavy

suitcases because I wasn't a very large person at that time. But I can remember a quarter tip was just you know, huge at the time. More typical it was ten cents or a nickel I shined the shoes of some very famous people, Monte Hale the old cowboy star being one of them, they were shooting some western movies around Wyoming. I later ran into him when I owned Pickfair and I said I know you don't remember this, but I shined your shoes (laughter) in 1947. And he remembered going to Wyoming in 1947. I became very good friends with Monte Hale and still am today.

MJ: Did he remember the incident?

JB: Well he didn't remember his shoes being shined, he remembered staying in Kemmerer, in the Kemmerer Hotel, and you know that was about it. But very pleasant man and could not believe that I remembered him and his fame has kind of drifted away obviously, but any old fan is a very dear fan at this time and so we became very good friends.

MJ: Why did you shine shoes, now I'm looking at a person's background I'm trying to figure out what causes him to do the things he does. Did your parents...did your father, did your mother say to you, "look Jerry, its time you went out and learned a little bit about life and work, let's go out and get you a job did it come from within you?

JB: No... they... well I didn't get along at all with my step father, so I guess pride, or whatever, I would never ask him for an allowance or any money, so the question was I had no money and in those small towns you needed a little money to play pool and bowl and to buy a 22 rifle and some ammunition to go rabbit hunting and buy tickets to the local baseball team and a few things like that a hamburger here and there. So the motivation was one that I wanted money to spend and a job that was open was the bellhop of the Kemmerer Hotel which involved shining shoes, I mean it was all the same job so I did that and hey, it was fine with me, I enjoyed it; there was nothing degrading to me about shining shoes, I enjoyed it and I seemed to get well paid, I certainly had a lot more money than any of the other kids because I was working 3 or 4 hours every day.

MJ: Were you different from the other kids in that respect where you couldn't afford to take off to get involved in sports?

JB: Well, I was on the football team, that was one of the things that irritated me I would always go out for football which would start in August just before school started and we would practice two or three weeks and then the first game would come and I'd get usually the first game and the second game under my belt and then I'd have to quit the team because I just didn't have any money. I guess I could have gotten along without any money and, I mean I had food and I had shelter but if I wanted any clothes or any of the optional items like let's say I had to have money and as I would quit the football team every year, it happened 3 out of 4 years.. ah, I always said to myself," one of these days because I work harder than other people I'll be very rich and when I do then I'm going to buy season tickets to every sports team I can imagine," so (laughter) some of the thoughts of those sports were set definitely in my mind at that time. I was also influenced by the football coach, a man by the name of Roland Koransi who played professional football for the New York Giants.

MJ: Roland Koransi?

JB: Right, Koransi. Yeah.

MJ: Out of where, where was he from?

JB: Well, I mean I don't really know where he came from prior to being in Kemmerer but he came directly out of pro ball.

MJ: Oh, OK.

JB: And became the coach there and of course Kemmerer immediately became a real powerhouse at that time. I was pretty impressed because I could see what coaching and what knowledge could do. We were never a good team and suddenly he's there we're good in football, he coached basketball, we were good in basketball. We had a good track team... ah, we were a rag-tag outfit before he got there he was able to somehow hustle and get us new uniforms and we walked out with pride and we played hard and we won.

MJ: My father used to tell me that a good coach can take a bunch of ragamuffins and make a good team out of them.

JB: Uh, On that level you definitely can, I think, because the material is roughly equal in all those little towns, and so the team that plays the best teamwork and tries the hardest and has the most pride generally becomes the better team.

MJ: Did he push you, drive you?

JB: He spent a lot of time with me, he knew I was not large enough to be a good athlete, I mean, uh, see in that I graduated right after I turned 17 during the football season of my senior year I was 16, so by the time I was a sophomore you can see I was 14 years old and I've weighed maybe 125 or 130 pounds (laughter) and I just wasn't your basic athletic material. So he spent a lot of time because he liked my attitude, he used to call me "Champ" all the time and he said "You're really going to be something because you never waste time". I mean if there was a half hour practice I would whip a book out and I'd start doing my homework while we were sitting around at practice or something. And he admired that and was a big contributor. He was best friends with the Chemistry teacher, Walt Garrett, who was a very fundamental guiding thing in my life and I later moved in with him. In between my Junior and Senior year the situation with my stepfather became intolerable and so I just moved out.

MJ: Now this is not C.O. Brown is it?

JB: Yeah, this is C.O. Brown.

MJ: OK.

JB: And so I moved out and I had a small room in back of the pool hall. and I used to set pins manually because they didn't have the automatics at that time, or at least in our pool hall they didn't. But after I was there a month or two the Chemistry teacher said "this just isn't good for you why don't you come live with me". and so I did and he just kept drilling me in chemistry, physics, mathematics, biology I had such an unbelievable science education when I got out of high school, it was incredible. I never really studied for the first two years of college because I had

already known everything and he was able to get me a scholarship to the University of Wyoming so....

MJ: Was he the inspiration in your life, do you think, and if you could learn from one person....

JB: Certainly, I don't know if you could take one person but if there were 3 or 4, he was very definitely one and probably the earliest one. He was the first inspiration, I was very lucky because later at the University I had several others that also inspired me to go even further.

MJ: Do you mind saying who they were?

JB: Not at all. There was a man at the University of Wyoming called Richard Beale who I admired a great deal and he encouraged me to go on and get a Ph.D. or at least a Masters, and he was able to get me a scholarship to the University of Southern California where I met Sidney Benson who probably is the single largest influence in my life. He was the brightest, most cordial man I've ever met.

MJ: At USC?

JB: At USC. I worked for him and got my Ph.D. under him. He's become a very, very famous chemist now, perhaps the single most famous American chemist alive today.

MJ: Something that interests me Jerry is ah you had a bent for mathematics, chemistry, physics,... apparently because not only were you drilled, apparently you had the ability or you wouldn't have gotten as far as you did in that area.

JB: I did, that was natural. I mean, there was no... you're just born with it. I did not study a lot in high school, I didn't really want to. The early stages, let's say as a freshman or a sophomore but still I would get A's in all the science and mathematics classes, it was just very easy and I didn't do any work to do it. Later as I became interested in the, through his urging, then I started studying rather hard and memorized a lot of science, learned a lot.

MJ: Then you graduated with a B.A. from the University of Wyoming... then a BS...in what?

JB: Chemistry.

MJ: Chemistry. And then you got your Master's....

JB: I skipped a Master's I went direct to a Ph.D.

MJ: OK, Oh, OK. Was that normal:

JB: It's not totally abnormal, it's not normal, but its not abnormal. It's 50-50 in science.

MJ: How did you - your background in chemistry physics and math, does that translate well into what you're doing now?

JB: Well, it did with a little detour. When I graduated in June 1957 with a doctorate, I'd spent by this time 7 or 8 years in chemistry laboratories and the smells were really getting to me, and I just had it with experimental chemistry and I heard about this unusual company who had hired scientists to work in business and it was an outgrowth of a group that had formed during the second world war, somebody had the foresight to say well these are mathematicians, chemists, physicists and some famous ones, Phil Morris a very famous physicist, George Kimble, a very famous chemist and they said let them look at some of the strategy problems in war and get a fresh scientific look at it. And wherever they touched it, it really... they made some very big contributions. After the second world war they said, Hey, business is war so why don't we just keep the same group , we'll bring them all to Arthur D.Little - a very big consulting firm - and we'll call it "Operation Research" and we'll have these people look at business. Well, I was very impressed because here are people with the same disciplines as myself working in business, they were out of the laboratory and they were very famous. So when I had an opportunity to join that company, I thought this is sensational. Now when I went back there they gave me business problems, I worked for Sears Roebuck ad a consultant, I worked for Ryerson Steel as a consultant, for Pan American Airways, scheduling, optimizing cataloging income, minimizing steel inventory and still servicing the customers. And so I found that I had a flair for looking at a business problem as nothing more than a mathematics problem.

MJ: Sort of like a standards checker. Somebody...tailorization.. you know.

JB: Yeah. Uh huh.

MJ: The scientific approach towards business.

JB: Yeah, just the optimization of certain things. Uh, today in almost every industry I can think of they have an operations research group in house this just happened to be the first one and I was lucky enough to be with it.

MJ: Now that was on the East coast.

JB: That was on the east coast

MJ: And then what was the circumstance that led you out to the east coast.

JB: Well, they had decided,... at that time they had two branches, one on the east and one on the west and I had gone to the east to be trained for 2 years and then move me back to the west. But that year, 1958, jet travel came in and it was no longer 11 hours from coast to coast, it was 5 hours, so they felt it was cheaper to fly out to the west coast and they closed their office there and that meant I could stay in Boston which I didn't like, working for a company I did like, or I could take my chances and go back to L.A. At that time scientists were very scarce it was the time of the Sputniks and everything and everybody that had a PhD in science was being wined and dined like athletes and (laughter) so I had no problems in relocating.

MJ: But now that, that is not what you are doing today, obviously.

JB: No, No, I started that but I didn't really like the missile industry, I really wanted to go back and teach, I wanted to go back to a University and teach, but the salaries were about half. If I made \$10,000 in industry I could make \$5,000 teaching ... I wanted to live on the \$10,000 level but I wanted to teach, so the question was how do I gain \$5,000 additional income and looking into real estate and doing some research, I came to the conclusion that if I owned a couple of apartment houses that could make the difference. So I said to myself it's worth 5 years to save every penny I make I'll live on an abject poverty level and I will then buy a couple of apartment houses then I will go to the University and teach and I'll have the additional income and I'll live the life I want. I did that I worked for four and a half years, my plan was five, and then I quit and started teaching at

USC. But by then the real estate company I had wasn't growing at the rate of \$5,000 or \$10,000 a year it was growing more \$100,000 a year so suddenly a hundred thousand a year to give that up to go back to the at \$10,000 (laughter), I did it, but that year I did a lot of soul searching and I came to the conclusion that no, I was really fascinated by the business I was amazed by the money and so I devoted full time to real estate. Ah, that was in 1962. By 1973 I was tired of real estate, I mean I had done essentially everything I could do I had made a couple of million dollars and I was seriously thinking of retiring and going back to teach at that time and I was reading the newspaper one day and they were starting a new sports league called World Team Tennis and the franchises were very inexpensive so I thought this is my cup of tea, so I bought a franchise and named it the Los Angeles Strings.

MJ: Strings?

JB: Yeah.Strings. Racket Strings. And ultimately won the world's championship the year I had Chris Everett, B. J. Armitrage.. several other players as well. And from 1973 to 1978 I devoted myself, in the beginning 10 or 15 percent of my time, probably by 1978 I was putting in 50 percent of my time in sports because I just loved it and I was playing here at the Forum.

MJ: And this goes back in a way to what you were thinking when you were a kid.

JB: At that time I had season tickets to every team both college and pro in Los Angeles and I would attend on the order of 250 sporting events a year.

MJ: Were you familiar with Jack Kent Cooke at that time?

JB: Well, once I moved into the Forum of course the Strings were playing here and I became very familiar with the Lakers and the Kings and Jack Kent Cooke. And then one day in 78 ah, I heard the rumor that he might sell the Forum, I approached him with it and he denied it but said he would like to talk to me about it because he found me interesting, or whatever. Ah, anyway I talked to him for one and a half years (laughter) and ultimately ended up buying the Lakers and the Kings and the Forum. And I took that over in May of 1979.

MJ: And you've had two world champions since, is that correct?

JB: Ah, the Lakers won the world's championship five times.

MJ: Under you?

JB: Under me.

MJ: Oh, I'm sorry because I was trying to determine how many won, and I thought the last two were yours but then.....

JB: I've had five, he had one in 1972 he won the world's championship. I won in '80,'82, '85, '87 and '88.

MJ: You know I think every now... this is just a presumption on my part, but I think every successful person looks back in time if he's sort of a historian, an armchair historian looking back at those key moments, the trigger, the key, you know something, some little thing that happened to you that pushed you in the right direction. Rather than going this way, you went that way, but it sounds to me like you were very determined to teach, you were very determined to make money so you could do what you wanted which was teaching, but something, some little thing happened, somewhere to push you down another lane.

JB: I think the turning points in my life were really Walt Garrett the Chemistry teacher who urged me to go to college because I'm not sure I would have gone otherwise. But he really urged me and pushed me and I went to the University of Wyoming. Once I was there I could see that as a scientist, as a chemist, you really didn't have that many doors open to you unless you had an advanced degree. and as I say Alvin Beale pushed me, urged me, he says you have the kind of talent to get a PhD, ah... only, you know, one out of probably 50 chemistry graduates at that time would end up with a Ph.D. and he said you're that one and made me believe in myself; gave me a lot of confidence. When you're from a small town and you think in terms of olympics or Ph.D.'s or professional sports you don't have the confidence in yourself to go that high; you think of yourself as a small-time person, you don't think you can get out there and compete with the big-time people. And so when you're young and somebody comes by and gives you confidence, says 'you can do it' and you believe in them, that's when the turning points come about. Once I hit USC, of course I met Sidney Benson and

that was marvelous because he really inspired me to work hard and get a Ph.D. (When)I started there were 47 people that started with me and only four of us received a Ph.D. And these were 47 people who had been selected out of something like 2000 applicants, so it was very difficult to get through and he was the inspiration during those four years.

MJ: Are you then by nature a competitive person, do you think?

JB: I'm a very competitive person, yes.

MJ: And are you a workaholic, would you say?

JB: If I enjoy what I'm doing I don't think I'm a workaholic if I didn't enjoy what I was doing. If I enjoy what I'm doing and it commands my interest then yes, I think I probably pay too much attention to work.

MJ: How much does your success with the Lakers have to do with being in the right place at the right time, historical circumstances granted you are a competitive person who likes to work hard at what he likes.

JB: Well, I think a great deal of it, the right person at the right place at the right time, I think what happened is I was very lucky in being handed the ingredients that could contribute to the success. I mean Magic Johnson, Jerry West, Bill Sharman, etc., Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. I think what I contributed was once I was handed those ingredients I don't think I messed it up. Ah, I think I took what was handed to me and I think I organized that rather well. On the other hand, if that hadn't been handed to me I don't know that we would have had any where near this kind of success. I just don't think we would have,

MJ: Now as far as I know, which is not very much, you're wealth, your riches, whatever you want to call it, your fortune derives from real estate.

JB: Ah, a lot, I mean certainly the beginnings of it came from real estate, but then we went through some bad real estate times and I lost a sizeable fraction of that estate, but while I was losing it in real estate I was making it back in sports, so you know I don't know how to answer that question at this point.

MJ: Well, I guess what I was driving at was that you know if times were fortuitous for you to be involved with Laker organization, were times fortuitous in the real

estate business industry when you first began to notice this burgeoning, you know, wealth, or income. I mean, was Southern California I guess is what I'm saying, right for you to enter the scene.

JB: It was. There is no question about it, but I had always had that kind of thought. In other words, it always impressed me because as I told you I'd spent three years in California from '42 to '45. And when I came here at that time there were just a lot of orange groves around and then as I came back and saw how many had been torn down and how many people moved in and you begin to read the papers, and I developed a very strong faith in the Southern California economy and certainly a lot of people did but I don't think maybe to the extent I did. I had , I really believed it would really become by far and away the most popular state in the union in not too long a time. Of course a lot of people thought that's impossible, New York will always be ahead of it but the handwriting was on the wall if you just bothered to read it.

MJ: So your name becomes synonymous with the, in a way, the growth, the expansion of the west. Post world war period of expansion in Southern California.

JB: I was there on the spot at that time. I've certainly been very lucky in terms of being at the spot, as you said, at the right time. But I also think that I've spent a lot of time recognizing that I was at the right spot at the right time and capitalizing on it.

MJ: I know you don't have too much more time, I've got a few more questions I would like to ask you. Ah, You know I suppose a lot of people have asked you this question, and I don't mean it to be an insult, but is sports a real business or is it a toy, I mean the people who buy into the enterprises, I read, as a commoner, a person who just picks up the paper and reads about it, I get this vision of an owner of a major sports branch as being a person who's made it elsewhere and says "Look, I like sports, I want to be involved in the glitz, I want to be involved in the glamour, I want to be involved in the action, ah, this is, you know, I want to live this kind of life.

JB: Well, I think its gone through cycles. The people who started the original professional football, professional basketball, those were business men and they were real football men and they were real basketball men and that was their life. I mean, we all have to read the stories about Papa Bear Halas and some of these....

MJ: Paul Brown.

JB: These people were very definitely business men and sports was their business but it was taken very seriously as a business. Then it became popular and price tags were put on it and then a lot of people from other sources came into it and said "Wow, if I buy this suddenly I'm a big sportsman and I don't even have to know anything about sports," so I think it went through the cycle of definite sports, people, sports business men, into a popularity situation where you bought something just because you happened to have the 50 million dollars involved. I now think it's swinging back the other way....

MJ: Because of cable maybe?

JB: Because it's becoming a bigger business. Partially because of cable, but also because of the interest in the world. I mean 15 years ago you didn't play football games in London and today not only do you play 'em you sell 'em out, and you play some football games in Japan, and the NBA plays all over and basketball is a very, very popular sport elsewhere.

MJ: Do you envision, I think a la Sports Illustrated's article, worldwide basketball, a worldwide NBA, so to speak.

JB: Absolutely. I just can't help but believe that will happen.

MJ: Now as I understand it, I heard this from somebody, you're not only interested in basketball, you're interested now in football, is that it? Are you looking at other sports?

JB: Ah, well... here I operate five or six sports. I operate basketball, and I did hockey until recently, volleyball, boxing, tennis, and soccer and so, I like all the sports. However, I think when I reached 55 it was kinda one of those magic years, and you say "OK, you're still young enough to do some more things but it won't be too

long before you can't say that, so whatever you want to do you'd better get at", and to own a football team or a baseball team really is something I have always wanted to do, and so this year I set myself the goal of trying to buy one of those. And I haven't determined which one I'll buy yet, football or baseball. But the answer to your question is Yes, I'm actively pursuing that and expect to be successful within a year.

MJ: If you go back to your childhood though you were so frustrated because you did not have the time to last out the season due to the fact that you had to work but that was football, now was there something special about basketball or was it again the situation? JB: Yeah, no, I liked basketball because basketball has by far and away the finest most graceful athletes. And actually during those three years while I was back in Los Angeles I became a dancer and I took a lot of lessons became a tap dancer and did have some modest success when I was 12-13 years old dancing on the stage, etc., but ballet, modern dance, etc. fascinated me and basketball is very similar, I mean if you take away the crowd noise and just film just some of the moves that are made, they are so similar to Nureyev etc., and so I love ballet and I loved the Lakers and there's not a great deal of difference between them as far as I can see.

MJ: I agree with you one hundred percent. I shoot both ballet, dance, whenever I can, and basketball, and I'm amazed at the similarity and you take Doctor J. movement like this to the rim to the hoop and, how close is that like you say, to a Nureyev or a

JB: Baryshnikov.

MJ: Baryshnikov, exactly. Well, Jerry I want to get back on track here and I find this very interesting. Can we go back to Wyoming for just a second. I think a lot of Wyoming people are interested in what you think about Wyoming. I think the people who are aware of who Jerry Buss is, maybe, just may in a fleeting moment be asking themselves, "You know, I wonder if that guy ever thinks about Wyoming." Wonder if he ever comes back, you know, wonder if he's so, you

know, so culturated out here, or so tied to Southern California that he never ever thinks about where he was raised or.....

JB: I think about Wyoming all the time. I love Wyoming and I love people from Wyoming and there's a great number of them that live in California. I still drive down the street and see the bucking horse on somebody's license plate (laughter) and I honk because I see number 19 and know they are from Uinta County and if there 12 I try to catch 'em and pull 'em over because that's where I came from so I probably know them. So I think a lot about Wyoming I mean the thoughts that go through my head, you know its probably one of the few places in the world you can live today being that close to nature. I mean the ability to go out and fish in a stream, hunt in the forest, or just looking at the mountains, the beauty, the snow, the tremendous desolation I mean the fact that its 50 miles between towns, etc. I could never really live there anymore because I found the cold really unbearable. I found it beautiful, but physically uncomfortable.

MJ: I think you mention... Larry Birleffi mentions in his article on how you pulled up on a hill, pulled off a highway and went up on a hilltop to catch his broadcast. Do you follow Wyoming football, basketball, sports at all?

JB: Umhum, sure I do. I follow them rather closely, you know, I mean each year I certainly read the scores every day. I try to follow some of the better players, you know, I'm anxious to see Eric Lechner and Fennis Dembo and as a matter of fact I saw too much of Lechner the other day because he beat the Lakers, (laughter) but yeah, I follow that. Fortunately most of the coaches from Wyoming know about me, because of being in sports and being from Wyoming, and so all the basketball people when they come out here I talk to 'em all the time and occasionally I meet some of the football coaches so I follow Wyoming sports pretty carefully.

MJ: You say you even may pull people over on the interstate if you see the 12 plate on their vehicles. Do you find Wyoming people are any different from any other people across the country, or you know are there some distinguishing characteristics?

JB: If you threw in Wyoming and Utah together, I at one time in my real estate business tried to hire people from those states, that had moved out here. And the reason I did that was the work ethic and the honesty. They had a work ethic I mean if you paid them they really felt they owed you a full days work and you would get that, and they had some honesty, etc. I mean a higher level on the average it seemed to me. And so, I have a lot of roots in Wyoming that I still remember and think about.

MJ: You haven't cut those off entirely?

JB: No. No, I mean I don't have any family living there which is why I don't go back anymore, the University itself, you know I try to do some things for it here and there. I am actively involved in USC so I perhaps I favor that school. I would like to go back to Laramie and I will go back to Laramie sometime. But again, you know the problem is you have school year and I'd like to go during that time but during that school year you have the Lakers and that makes me very, very busy and I don't get as lot of time but I definitely will be in Laramie in the next two or three years.

MJ: I'm kinda curious whether you feel that Wyoming people have sort of neglected you by not giving you maybe the kind of recognition you know, a university award, or maybe you have already received one. The recognition that maybe you deserve and.....

JB: No, I don't think so, I think that, you know, although I had developed a reasonable fortune some time ago, ten years ago, I wasn't really well known and I don't know how they would have found out what I was doing really. I mean you don't write 'em a letter and say you know "I've been really successful, I've made a lot of money," you know, but once I was in the newspapers and everything people from Wyoming started contacting me and, originally, sometimes to talk to an athlete to help them recruit, I'd get letters from a few people around the University of Wyoming, I can probably, I probably have telephone numbers of at least 20 University of Wyoming graduates that I probably see almost every year. Go to a basketball game with me or something like that. In fact my roommate

from the University of Wyoming works for me here at the Forum, Ken Doi. So I... you know, there has always been a fondness for the University of Wyoming and I feel like I have been treated very, very well. They've asked me to come back several times to be honorary this or honorary that and unfortunately you know their times, giving a commencement or something like that, is right in the playoffs, the NBA finals, so I can't do certain things. But I think I have been treated very well by the University of Wyoming.

MJ: Some people, I talked to a couple of people who don't like..., pretty high up people of Wyoming, who don't like to look back on their past. It looks like you could go back and give a commencement address for the next graduation. Would you dwell on your childhood there? What would you tell Wyoming people in coming back; what would be something you'd like to really them?

JB: Well, I think for one thing they're getting some of the finest education in the world. I mean when I left the University of Wyoming, I went up against Harvard graduates, MIT, Cal Tech, etc., etc. I was the only person I knew from a small school but I held my own and I won the game. I mean I was one of the four who made. So, I had a very good education at the University of Wyoming and I had a superb, absolutely superb education coming out of high school. And so I think my message 'em would be "You are well educated you are going to be very prepared and as you now graduate and get out there and see what's happening I think you're going to be surprised what Wyoming has given to you." Also the work ethic, you know, like it or not shining shoes there, working on the railroad as a gandy dancer as I said, ah, these things instilled in me an "earn your money attitude". What's that commercial, you know, "We got our money the old-fashioned way, we earned it." And that's kinda the philosophy that Wyoming left me with. I like to feel that the people respect me as a man and I think, that manhood was shaped in Wyoming; I think it gave me a lot. I'm very thankful that I grew up in Wyoming, I think things could have gone very differently and possibly very badly for me had I grown up in other places.

MJ: You think so?

JB: Yes.

MJ: Another famous Wyomingite came from Kemmerer, John Cash Penney.

JB: Yeah, that certainly is.....(laughter)

MJ: Just a couple more. Your family. Do you have a family of your own?

JB: Yes. I was married to a University of Wyoming graduate; her maiden name was JoAnn Mueller. We had four children and we were married fourteen years and divorced and she is still around and still keeps her contacts with Wyoming. She has a sister who lives in Casper and comes out every year.

MJ: You have two boys, two girls?

JB: Two boys, two girls.

MJ: Your story reminds me a lot of an oil man in Cheyenne by name of Morrie Brown, Maurice Brown, who is a big supporter of the University of Wyoming and went from the liquor business into the oil business. And he sold papers out at Warren Air Force Base and there's some things very reminiscent of your story, in his. But I think what he is going to do for his kids is to make sure, I feel that he's trying to make sure, that they're well prepared for life and maybe they don't have to do some of the things he had to do. For example, he never got a chance to play ball in Cheyenne like he wanted to play, so by gosh his kids are going to get to go to every basketball camp there ever was practically (that's an exaggeration) but he's going to make darned sure that his kids get what he didn't get. Do you feel that way?

JB: Oh, I think every parent feels that way. If you've had some denial or if you felt you had some denial as a child and you have the opportunity to give it to your children, it's the first thing that goes through your mind. I certainly did that....unfortunately that can be a euphemism for being spoiled. (laughter)

MJ: I was just going to ask you if....(laughter)

JB: I don't think my children are spoiled. I think things have come to them a lot easier than they did to me, and I think I worked for it in order to do that. Somehow, in a way, I feel that they miss the opportunity of gaining that for

themselves; I'm not sure that the motivation of giving your children something you didn't have is a good motivation. I probably have more mature thoughts about that than I did when I was twenty-five and twenty-eight when all these things were happening.

MJ: Very good. What's your fondest desire?

JB: Well, I really would like to win a few more championships with the Lakers. It's important to me because, for one thing, I mean one player won eight championships, that's the record, and Magic has five and he's probably got four, maybe five years left so if he can win three more world championships then he would be the winningest player that ever played the game and I think he deserves it because he is the best player that ever played the game. I would like to be there with him during that period of time. I'd like to get into another sport and win the world's championship. I would love to win the World Series, or I would love to win the Super Bowl and I.....**(end of side #1)**

JB: That's an interesting question. Well, I guess in terms of my work, I'd like to be remembered for being a winner. In terms of my life itself, I think I would like to be known as a fair and a just person who tried very hard to help people and I would like to be remembered as a family man, who severely loved all of his children.

MJ: Very good. Are you an educator still - do you still educate?

JB: Yeah, Very definitely...whenever I get a chance for blackboard I'm up there and I'm doing this and that. I miss that, I think I would have been good at it and there's lotta parts of me that sometime reminisce and think "I wonder what it would have been like. Could I have won the Nobel Prize, how many Ph.D.'s would I have turned out?" I have that educational urge in me.

MJ: Can I ask you a question that I'd just like to know?

JB: Sure.

MJ: Probably a pretty common question, but has success spoiled your....,changed Jerry Buss? I mean, apparently you have a lot of money - has that changed you as a person?

JB: Well there are some changes you have to go through, you know. For instance, if I walk into a restaurant - while I'm eating my dinner fifteen people ask me for my autograph so you know it changed Jerry Buss because the other Jerry Buss would have just eaten his dinner;(laughter) and this Jerry Buss has to smile and interrupt his dinner. But I would think its changed me a great deal - mainly because money itself was not all that important to me. That may sound strange to you because I'm trying to save \$100 million dollars to buy a football team, so.... but it's the football team not the \$100 million that was important. And even owning the football team I'm not sure that's the important thing, the ability to make all the decisions on an absolute basis, to run the football team is a very important thing to me.

MJ: Absolute control?

JB: Absolute control. Yeah, you can't do it without that. I wouldn't want to try.

MJ: So is it the process itself?

JB: It's not the money, its the process, right, its the war, the competition, for instance for an example, when one of my friends and I go to Las Vegas, I tend to play at a Black Jack table whichever one is open as opposed to the bigger stakes ones because it doesn't really matter to me whether I win or lose in dollars but if I get a stack of chips I want to see if I can double the stack. (laughter) the fact that they are 5's doubled or 100's doubled is not really, has never been that important to me. You know, I wear a Seiko watch and I wear a pair of levis and a leather jacket and I really could, if I chose, afford a lot more I suppose. But, I'm me, I'm comfortable, this is me. What I'm really being myself when I had that opportunity away from the spotlight, you know I have a small room with a lot or books and I spend a lot of time reading, watching TV and taking long walks which I also learned to do in Wyoming. And that's the real me. The other one, which occasionally appears in a tuxedo with gold watches or surrounded by a lot of very famous people, I do that because it really can raise a lot of money. In other words when somebody calls me to do a charity if they are only calling me to do it, sometimes I'll send in a donation and I don't bother with any of the functions. But

if they say let us honor us or let us put you on the dias or something like that, I tend to say yes because of, according to them my name produces an extra 15 or 20 tables which in turn produces an extra hundred and 50 thousand dollars for somebody and so I don't mind that. I do that as my way of contributing, but if everybody left me alone, I think I would just grab a tape, just back to somebody in moccasins, and, levi jacket, and read paperback books, (laughter) that's what I like to do.

MJ: How do you throw off the pressure?

JB: That's kinda what I do. I have a house in Encinitas which is (unintelligible) place a long ways from.....Santa Fe, and that's what I do, I just get out of town I just go down there, I don't have a telephone, I read a lot and I walk a lot and I have some of my children down there and I spend a lot of time with them. You know I just become.... its very funny because every once in a while, for instance out at Del Mar at the race track, I sit out in the infield with all the picnickers and \$2.00 beer drinkers and every once in a while someone will recognize me and say "you know you look like Jerry Buss but you just, you couldn't be sitting out here. I mean if you're Jerry Buss you'd be in the Turf Club and you'd be doing all these things." I said "No, you know...." He says 'why are you here', I said, "I guess I grew up this way and so here's where I'm comfortable , I'm comfortable doing this, I'm not comfortable doing that." I think if my parents had been in the Turf Club and had taken me as a little boy maybe you get used to it. But I guess they didn't do that and so drinking beer and sitting out on the picnic grounds is much more comfortable for me. And I just don't want to be uncomfortable and I don't feel that I have been pretentious so I do what makes me comfortable, you know, I walk in and sit at a bar and have a couple of glasses of scotch by myself, you know, at a stool at a bar and when people recognize me, they almost invariably say "You look like Jerry Buss" but they don't think I am because I....

MJ: Birleffi called you a Horatio Alger story, I guess, Do you feel you are a Horatio Alger story?

JB: I guess, I mean, you know that's kind of a simple, naive story, you know - poor boy makes good or something in the big city. I think things have gone very well for me that way, but I think that's kind of an oversimplification perhaps. But I mean it's descriptive, you know, if you say that's a Horatio Alger story, they gather two things; you're doing pretty well and you started pretty poor, so I guess that says something..

MJ: The great American dream. But at least you haven't gone from rags to riches to rags, like some have.

JB: In professional sports, I'm still young (laughter) maybe I will.

MJ: Well Jerry....(end of tape)